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ABSTRACT

Adult sensitivity toward young children has long been considered an important component of quality caregiving. Because most studies of child caregiver sensitivity have measured behavior toward a group of children, knowledge of important differences in behavior toward individual children, as well as a way to compare mother and "other" care, are lacking. This study investigated the relation between observational items developed to assess mother care and measures traditionally used to assess child care providers, specifically the group-level Arnett Scale of Caregiver Sensitivity. Subjects were 23 licensed family child care providers. They were observed on a typical day care morning using the Arnett scale and the Family Day Care Rating Scale; to assess the sensitivity of a caregiver to an individual target child, an observational tool developed as part of the Child Outcome Study (COS) of the National JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program Evaluation was used. Results showed a significant correlation between the Arnett subscales and the COS sensitivity factor. This outcome, considered along with Oldham's (1995) work, supports the importance of examining dyad-level caregiver behavior as well as group-level behavior. (EV)

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Group-Level Versus Dyadic-Level Measurement of Caregiver Sensitivity in Child Care

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Group-Level Versus Dyadic-Level Measurement of Caregiver Sensitivity in Child Care

Adult sensitivity toward young children has long been considered an important component of quality caregiving, in both the parent-child and child care provider-child relationship. Extant research demonstrates the relation between adult sensitivity and child outcomes, particularly within child care settings (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990).

Most studies of child caregiver sensitivity have assessed sensitivity with the Arnett (1989) scale of caregiver sensitivity. The Arnett scale is an observational measure of caregiver behavior toward a group of children, not toward a specific child. The Arnett scale yields three scores: sensitivity, detachment and harshness.

Lack of observational data on caregiver sensitivity toward a target child represents a serious gap in the literature for two main reasons. First, it is reasonable to assume that caregivers do not behave in the same manner toward all children in their care. Summary measures of caregiver sensitivity toward a group of children may mask important differences in caregiver behavior toward individual children. Second, development of a measure of adult sensitivity toward a target child can be used to observe parents and child care providers. Progress toward a common metric by which to assess mother and child care provider behavior toward young children is highly desirable. A common

metric could provide important information on the comparability of mother and "other" care.

The current study investigated the relation between observational items developed to assess mother care and measures traditionally used to assess child care providers. More specifically, among family child care providers, it was of interest to examine the relation between the group-level Arnett scale and observational items developed to assess mother care, but were believed to relate in expected ways with the Arnett. Because family child care is provided within homes, this context provided a unique forum in which to explore these issues.

Subjects

Twenty-three licensed family child care providers who had recently completed a training class participated in the current study. These providers represent a subsample of a larger study of family child care providers (Kontos, Howes, Shinn & Galinsky, 1995).

Measures

Several observational measures were used in the current study. To assess caregiver sensitivity toward the group of children, the Arnett (1989) Scale of Caregiver Sensitivity was used. To assess the quality of the family child care programs, the Harms and Clifford (1989) Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCERS) was used.

Alternative observational items were developed as part of the Child Outcome Study (COS) of the National JOBS

Evaluation (Moore, Zaslow, Coiro, Miller & Magenheim, 1994). The COS is a study of recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and their preschoolers. The observational items developed for the COS were designed for use by survey researchers as they conducted in-home interviews and child assessments. Several of the COS items were taken from the Caldwell and Bradley (1984) HOME scale. Other items were specifically designed for the COS. All COS items were rated on a 0 - 10 scale, with 10 representing the most desirable behavior. The COS items were used as a supplement to questionnaire and observational measures. The COS items were used to measure the sensitivity of a caregiver toward an indivual target child, in contrast to the group focus of the Arnett Scale.

Procedures

Each family child care provider was observed by one researcher on a typical day care morning as part of a larger study on family child care (Kontos, Howes, Shinn & Galinsky, 1995). Observers took notes while in the setting, and completed their measures immediately following the observation.

Results

The 17 COS items were subjected to a factor analysis with varimax rotation, yielding two factors: sensitivity and environmental cleanliness (see Table 1). Pearson correlations revealed significant, expected correlations between the COS sensitivity factor and the Arnett sensitivity

and detachment subscales (see Table 2). No signficant relations were found between the cleanliness factor and the other measures.

Discussion and Implications

This study represents a preliminary attempt at illustrating the need for common metrics on which to assess mother-child and caregiver-child interactions and relationships. In addition, the significant, expected correlations between the Arnett subscales and COS sensitivity factor suggests the importance of examining group-level and dyad-level caregiver behavior toward children.

Recent research by Oldham (1995) demonstrates the power of dyad-level caregiver sensitivity in predicting child outcomes. Oldham (1995) reworded the Arnett scale so that each item addresses the caregiver's behavior toward an individual child. She completed the group-level and dyad-level Arnett scales on center-based child care teachers. In addition, she completed the Waters and Deane (1985) Attachment Q-Set on multiple target children within each classroom with the same caregiver. She found that the dyad-level Arnett scale, specifically the detachment subscale, was a much better predictor of child attachment security than was data from the group-level Arnett scale. In fact, contrary to previous research (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1990), the group-level Arnett did not significantly predict children's attachment security scores.

Our work, taken together with the work of Oldham (1995), suggests that merit clearly lies in addressing the behavior of individual caregivers toward individual children. In order to address and assess the individual child's experience with a caregiver, whether in the home or within a group child care context, more methodological work needs to be done. In addition, it is important and illuminating to continue to assess both the dyad and group levels to further understand the unique contributions each type of caregiver behavior makes toward children's well being.

Table 1. Individual items comprising factors from COS

Factor 1: Sensitivity

Caregiver was extremely friendly, pleasant

Caregiver was completely focused on tasks, attentive

Caregiver was extremely warm, loving, affectionate to child

Caregiver's voice conveyed very positive feelings about child

Caregiver spoke to child in complete, complex sentences

Child spontaneously made positive attempts to get caregiver's attention

Factor 2: Cleanliness

All visible rooms of house/apartment were extremely clean

There is no clutter in any of the visible rooms of house/apartment

Table 2. Correlation between COS factors and other measures.

	Arnett sensitivity	Arnett detachment	Global/average FDCERS score
COS factors			
Sensitivity	.59**	-.75**	.46*
Cleanliness	.03	-.04	-.001

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

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